

**BOROUGH OF WATCHUNG  
MAYOR AND COUNCIL  
MINUTES  
JULY 19, 2018 - 7:30 P.M.**

**OPENING STATEMENT:** Mayor Stephen K. Pote called the meeting to order at 7:34 PM and made the following statement: Under the provisions of N.J.S.A.10:4-6 et seq., notice of the time and place of this meeting was given by way of annual notice to the Courier News, Echoes Sentinel, and Star Ledger, and posted at Borough Hall.

**SALUTE TO THE FLAG and MOMENT OF SILENCE FOR OUR SERVICE MEN AND WOMEN, SERVING HOME AND ABROAD. MAYOR POTE ALSO TOOK A MOMENT OF SILENCE FOR THE PASSING OF RICHARD WELDON.**

**ROLL CALL**

Gibbs [ P ] Black [ P ] Nehls [ P ] Mobus [ A ] Sopko [ P ] Alberto [ P ]

Also present were Administrator Tom Atkins, Attorney Albert Cruz, Engineer Tom Herits, Deputy Clerk MaryAnn Hance and Administrative Assistant Regina Angelo.

There were 55 members of the public present.

**PROCLAMATION**

Spinal Muscular Atrophy Awareness Month – August

Mayor Pote read a Proclamation declaring August as Spinal Muscular Atrophy Awareness Month in the Borough (copy attached.)

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**REPORT OF STANDING COMMITTEES:**

1. Administration & Finance – In the absence of Councilman Mobus, Council President Gibbs provided a report and noting on the Agenda Resolutions R12 and R13 is for the appropriation to purchase an electronic sign for the front of Borough Hall. He said he hopes the electronic sign can relay more information necessary to our residents.
2. Police – Council President Gibbs had no report. He said he is trying to schedule a meeting within the next few weeks.
3. Public Works / Buildings and Grounds – Councilman Nehls reported that he and Ms. McCoy met with Synergy Environmental on July 12<sup>th</sup> in an effort to get Spratford Park completed. He reported the pothole repairs are still ongoing. He also said the tent was installed at Brook Hill Swim Club for the summer camp program.

4. Public Affairs:

Environmental – Councilwoman Alberto said there were several tree reports done in May and June. She said the Commission has recommended an increase in the tree bank from \$200.00 to \$350.00 per tree which hasn't been finalized yet. She mentioned that the trees on Somerset Street look beautiful. She also said the next meeting is scheduled for August 27<sup>th</sup>.

Recreation – Mr. Atkins commented that the Summer Camp program is going very well.

Historical – Mayor Pote extended a thank you to Mr. Scott Hayword for moving a large and heavy amount of tiles stored behind Borough Hall to the Texier House.

Board of Health – Councilman Black had no report. He said there is a scheduled meeting in September.

5. Fire – Commissioner Black said he got the final number for the Pierce Engine which is \$710, 539.83. He reported the number did go up due to some increased material costs. He talked about the length of the truck which may be an issue for the tight corners and narrow streets in Watchung. He said if we shorten the length of the truck that may bring down our cost more. Councilman Black said we need to get the right truck and the right length, something that can manipulate around our streets and driveways to help our citizens. Councilman Black said he will have a final number in September. Council President Gibbs added that the Borough has been putting money away each year

for this purchase and we currently have close to \$500,000., so when we are ready to purchase the new truck, there will be no new debt incurred. He also pointed out this periodic replacement plan is being followed, as per the recommendation of the Rogers Group report. Councilman Black added that the Fire Department has committed to funding \$75,000. worth of equipment for the new vehicle when we get it. Councilman Black also noted that the Department answered 30 calls last month.

6. Laws/Ordinances – Councilman Black said they are trying to set a date for the next meeting.

#### **REPORTS – OTHER:**

7. Engineer- Tom Herits commented on the Weldon’s loss and said the family has been a great neighbor and that it has been great working with them, both personally and professionally. He commented on the permits for Ross Pond is in process and we should be hearing back shortly.. He said all the annexes have been completed for the County Hazard Mitigation plan for the Borough. Mayor Pote commented he had met with Engineer Herits and Councilman Mobus to finalize the 911 walkway.
8. Police Chief – No report.
9. Fire Department – No report.
10. Rescue Squad – No report.
11. Emergency Management – Mr. Atkins announced that the Governing Body has received a bullet-point outline on what has to be done to update the Hazard Mitigation plan, and added this information is also on the back table for the public to take and review. He asked everyone to look over the plan. He said this information is also on the webpage. Mr. Herits commented that the idea is to list projects they would like to see done that eliminate problems during storms. For example he said a previous recommendation was to install generators at all Borough buildings, which was done (except for the Library). He said FEMA had given us some money for this because it was in our plan. They recommend the powerlines put underground, however, this is very costly. He said there was about 25 projects they would like to see done in the Borough. Mayor Pote commented on the amount of preparation and investment required for preparation of these types of incidents. He also commented the County advised we need better communication with our residents and we need to be creative.
12. Attorney – Attorney Cruz reported that the Affordable Housing Settlement Agreement Fairness hearing is still as scheduled for August 9, 2018. He said as part of this matter, the Council referred to the Planning Board the task of determining if the Bonnie Burn Road property is an area in need of redevelopment. He said the Planning Board had this on their July agenda and intends to finalize their recommendation at their next meeting on August 21, 2018. In regard to the Library litigation, he said there will be a case management conference on August 2<sup>nd</sup>, before Judge Miller.
13. Clerk – Deputy Clerk MaryAnn Hance reminded everyone to sign the bill list.
14. Administrator – Mr. Atkins reported on the additional name change made to Resolution R4, adding an additional substitute camp counselor. He explained that resolution R5 is not for an additional hearing officer, this is for a new hearing officer, as the previously appointed person had a conflict. Announced the tax bills which will be mailed soon, noting there will be an extended grace period. He explained the delay in certifying the tax rate. He also said the supervisory and management training has been completed for the Borough of Watchung employees. Mr. Atkins also mentioned the County is going to revamp their recycling program by doing dual stream recycling, and this will be happening soon in Watchung, however, a section at a time.

Mayor Pote commented on the Park and Ride in Warren and how best we could link into that process. Mayor Pote said he asked Councilman Mobus to work together with Warren to be a part of that process. Mr. Atkins agreed we need an elected official involved. Councilman Sopko commented that we are also working to develop our own Park and Ride in Watchung.

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#### **PUBLIC PORTION / AGENDA ITEMS ONLY**

Michael Colucci, Johanna Lane, said he is very opposed to the closing of the Watchung Library, he said he uses it often.

Margaret Ellis, Valley Road, read a letter from the Watchung Library Advisory Board urging the Council to reconsider its resolution of April 19, 2018, and support a full-service library remaining within the Borough limits in Watchung. The letter states why Watchung should draft and approve a referendum, for the 2018 General Election in November.

Sophia Lee, Spencer Lane, again read the proposed referendum question she had read at two previous meetings, urging the Council to reconsider and put this referendum to a vote.

Tamara Benc, Lakeview Avenue, said our library is not a luxury but a service we have come to rely. She told the Council if they truly believe they are representing a majority of the residents they should have no fear in placing a referendum on the ballot. She asked the council to stop referring to the 2012 referendum as this issue is different and much has changed in the Borough since 2012. She said if the Council truly believes that they are doing what the residents want, and not acting on their own personal agendas, then a referendum should be on the ballot this November.

Hans Juette, Elsinore Drive, said the residents would like to hear the Council's reasons for not having a library and not having a question on the ballot as there was no opportunity to speak when the Resolution was voted on. Mr. Juette said we have the lowest debt we have had in ten years and he thinks we need to debate the fact that we can't afford the library. He also said the residents need to know where the council stands. He thinks it is important to remember that this year is different and there are opportunities for choices.

Diana Churchill, High Tor Drive, said based off what the gentleman said previously this year is also different because it's the last year we can apply for the matching funds.

Jay Stiles, Anderson Road, said he remembers the 2012 referendum asking the question to the residents - do they want the Borough to spend 4.2 million dollars on repairs to the Library – it never asked if the Library should be closed. He commented that he doesn't know how people are saying residents voted to close the library. He noted that Watchung residents voted affirmatively in the last November's referendum to support State funding of Libraries so why wouldn't they support a local library? He also said he hasn't seen a statement from those who oppose it or why they oppose it and would really like to see those statements.

Phyllis Juette, Elsinor Drive, told a story of an experience she had as a teacher, when a young girl forgot her text book one day, and came back with her grandfather to pick it up. She said the grandfather explained he grew up under communist rule and said the two most important things in life are the second amendment right to own a gun, and a library for book to learn. She explained that when communists take over a country, they burn the books so people can't learn. She asked the Council members to not be bullied by one person or one group, to think for themselves, and to do the right thing.

Tom Ruding, Fox Chase, said he is currently a renter, but looking to buy. He said it's important to him to see what the town has to offer to its residents, how focused on the future it is. He explained that by taking away a free public library the only people that get hurt are our children, and the children are the future. He said at one time, Andrew Carnegie had offered to build a Library in any community who wanted one – that is how important he values a library. He asked the Council to please give him a reason to move here by having an active library.

Andrew Calandriello, Hughes Lane, that all of the Council who sit on the dais are to do so with upmost good faith, as they were elected to do what's right for the residents and by closing the library the residents of the community are losing faith in the Council. He also asked the Council to please consider keeping the library open.

Tom Franklin, Wildwood Terrace, asked the Council to elaborate about the arrangements to provide library services elsewhere. He also said Warren did not build their library to accommodate two towns. He asked the Council what they plan to do with the Arts Center. Councilman Black replied to Mr. Franklin that there is no plan right now. Mr. Franklin commented that the Council shouldn't vote on these resolutions until they know what to do with the Arts Center. He also said the 2012 question never asked the residents of the town if they wanted to close the library.

Gulshan Chhabra, Old Somerset Road, said this is the first time he ever came to a council meeting. He said by closing the library services it will bring the value of the properties in Watchung down. Mr. Chhabra said he has a solution to the problem and he would like to build the library at his cost and paid by him. He said he did not want to disclose his idea in front of the Council because he felt they would take it and give it to their developer friends. He advised the Council to take the grant from the County and grant from the State and he will pay the rest of the cost to build the Library. Council President Gibbs said he would like to meet with Mr. Chhabra to discuss the details.

Caitlin Churchill, High Tor Drive, said it is important to her to see a town come together about something they care about. She said when she was a child most of her memories are at the Watchung Library. She said to imagine kids growing up without a Library hurts a lot.

Anthony Ingrassia, High Oaks Drive, said his mother volunteered regularly at the library for over 20 years. He said we all have to be united in the understanding that a safe high performing and high run school district is vital to our town. He said he did not expect the district to be performing at the lowest level in history as his children were entering Elementary school. He commented that we face the decision to either be part of the solution or part of the problem.

Margaret Ellis speaking for Virginia Hartmann, Ellisen Road, said the residents of Watchung pay over \$827,000. per year for a library but what we didn't know was that the total value of what we get back from the County is well over 1 million dollars. She said in light of considering closing the library this makes no sense. She explained we would be cutting off 1 million dollars' worth of benefits to the community that we receive for only \$827, 000 dollars. She also said it is fiscally responsible to continue this arrangement.

Tom Franklin, Wildwood Terrace, said he was delighted to hear the gentleman's proposal on funding the library and requested the Council table the resolutions on the agenda until they investigate the offer presented

Hans Juette, Elsinore Drive, said the Council is all bent out of shape about spending \$190,000. for 20 years. He said we can't think of spending that kind of money on debt services for brand new building but we can spend that kind of money for employees to staff the center. He added that we can't have the building sitting there and nobody doing anything with it.

Diana Churchill, High Tor Drive, asked the process to be explained if a private citizen is asking to fund the library as long as we provide the matching funds. Attorney Cruz responded we do not have the details of the offer so we cannot answer that question. Ms. Churchill asked how it works with the resolutions on the agenda and the offer presented. Attorney Cruz responded the two items are not related to each other.

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### UNFINISHED BUSINESS

A Public Hearing on Ordinance OR:18/13 – **"AN ORDINANCE TO AMEND THE CODE OF THE BOROUGH OF WATCHUNG CH. 5-12-12.76 ET. SEQ., THEREOF AND TO FIX AND DETERMINE MINIMUM AND MAXIMUM SALARIES AND COMPENSATION TO BE PAID TO CERTAIN EMPLOYEES."** was held.

Councilman Black moved a public hearing be held with a second by Council President Gibbs and upon roll call the vote was as follows: Gibbs, Black, Nehls, Sopko, Alberto "aye."

With no one from the public wishing to be heard Councilman Black closed the public hearing and moved the following resolution:

R1:07/19/18 Adoption of OR:18/13 – Salary Min-Max / 2018

Council President Gibbs seconded the motion and upon roll call the vote was as follows: Gibbs, Black, Nehls, , Sopko, Alberto "aye."

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### NEW BUSINESS

**CONSENT AGENDA:** The Consent Agenda Items listed below were unanimously accepted, following a motion by Council President Gibbs and a second by Councilman Nehls.

Prior to the vote Councilman Gibbs requested Correspondence #20 be pulled for separate vote.

Council President Gibbs moved to accept the following, as amended, with a second by Councilman Nehls and upon roll call vote was as follows: Gibbs, Black, Nehls, Sopko, Alberto, "aye."

Approval of the following Council minutes:

June 7, 2018 – Regular Meeting Minutes  
June 21, 2018 – Special Meeting Minutes

Acknowledging Receipt of the following Borough Reports:

Environmental commission Minutes – January 22, 2017/March 26, 2017/  
April 23, 2018/May 29, 2018  
Planning Board Minutes – May 15, 2018  
Building Department Report – June 2018  
Board of Adjustment Minutes – June 14, 2018  
Police Activity Report – June 2018  
Traffic and Beautification Minutes – June 2017

Acknowledging Receipt of the following Correspondence:

- #20 - PSE&G 5/21/18 Notice of Public Hearing of Proposed Increase in the Company's Rates and for Changes in the Tariffs for Electric and Gas Service c: M&C, TEA, Post
- #21 - Alan Haveson – June 22, 2018 – Letter to Planning Board, Notification of Resignation
- #22 - Township of Green Brook 7/27/18 Notice of Public Hearing on July 10, 2018 on 2 Proposed Zoning Ordinances #2018-852: Repealing and Replacing Entire Contents of the Affordable Housing Ordinance; #2018-853: Amending Code, Adding Affordable Housing District #3; 2018-854: Amending Code, Adding Affordable Housing c: M&C, TEA, TH, Pl. Board
- #23 - Township of Berkeley Heights 6/21/2018 Finalization Judgement of Compliance & Response c: M&C, TEA, AC
- #24 - Township of Warren Board of Adjustment 7/12/18 Notice of Public Hearing to consider application of residential units (market rate and townhomes, including 9 residential units located on Block 201, Lot 17 in Watchung) of RETS Partners, LLC / Robert Berlant c: M&C, TEA, Pl.Bd.
- #25 - Township of Warren 7/13/2018 Notice of Adoption of Ordinance 18-15 an Ordinance Amending Chapter XV Entitled “Land Use Procedures: by Repealing and Replacing Section 15-5.4 Entitled “Development Fees to Fund Affordable Housing” & Adoption of Ordinance 18-17 Amending and Supplementing Chapter XVI Entitled “Zoning” by Amending Subsection (C) Entitled “Requirements for, For Sale Units” of Section 16-6.5 Entitled “Affordability, Stratification and Income Limits.”

Councilman Nehls moved correspondence #20 be adopted with a second by Councilwoman Alberto and upon roll call the vote was as follows: Black, Nehls, Sopko, Alberto “aye.”

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### CONSENT AGENDA RESOLUTIONS

Council President Gibbs moved the following resolutions with a second by Councilman Nehls and upon roll call the vote was as follows: Gibbs, Black, Nehls, Sopko, Alberto, “aye”.

R2:07/19/18 Purchases over \$2,000 – L-3 Communications Mobile- Vision Inc. (PD-Equipment)  
Fit-Rite Uniform, Inc. (PD – Uniforms)  
Galbraith Landscape Const. (Public Works Texier House)

R3: Accepting the 2018-2019 Municipal Alliance Grant Contract

R4: Appointment of Recreation Camp Counselors / Hannah Salkowski & Phillip Cain

R5: Appoint Professional Service – Special Hearing Officer / Brian W. Kronick, Esq.

R6: Authorizing the Borough of Watchung to Participate in the Union County Cooperative Pricing Agreement

- R7: Authorizing Shared Services Agreement for Somerset County Department of Public Works Equipment and Personnel with the Borough of Watchung
- R8: Authorize Expansion of Contract / Maser Consulting / Affordable Housing Services
- R9: Authorize Clerk to Advertise for Bids / High Tor Drive
- R10: Authorize Payment of Tax Sale Certificate #16-01 / 85 Wetumpka Lane
- R11: Waive Chapter 2-25.10 of the Code – The Brooklyn Press

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## NON-CONSENT AGENDA

Council President Gibbs moved the following resolution with a second by Councilman Nehls and upon roll call the vote was as follows: Gibbs, Black, Nehls, Sopko, Alberto, “aye.”

R12: 07/19/18 Amendment to 2018 Capital Budget

Introduction of CAP Funding Ordinance OR: 18/14 entitled “**AN ORDINANCE PROVIDING FOR THE INSTALLATION AND ACQUISITION OF AN ELECTRONIC SIGN AT BOROUGH HALL FOR THE BOROUGH OF WATCHUNG, IN THE COUNTY OF SOMERSET, NEW JERSEY AND APPROPRIATING \$25,000.00 THEREFOR FROM THE CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT FUND.**” Public Hearing to be held on August 16, 2018

Council President Gibbs moved the following resolution with a second by Councilman Nehls and upon roll call the vote was as follows: Gibbs, Black, Nehls, Sopko, Alberto, “aye”.

R13: Introduction of Ordinance OR:18/14 – Electronic Sign

Attorney Cruz made statements regarding R14 and R15 in terms of the pending litigation. Attorney Cruz also said these motions are independent and have nothing to do with a potential offer to build or not build a library and these resolutions clarify the procedural issues.

Attorney Cruz read R14 in full.

Mayor Pote asked that R14 be amended to change the Building and Grounds Committee mentioned in point 3 of the Resolution to the following Council people: Council President Gibbs, Councilman Mobus and Councilman Nehls. Councilman Nehls and Councilwoman Alberto agreed to the amendment.

*Councilman Nehls said that on April 19, 2018 he made 2 motions pertaining to the Library, which are accurately reflected in the minutes. The first motion was adopted by a vote of 5 to 1, the second motion was adopted unanimously. On June 1, 2018, an unincorporated association of citizens know as the citizens to “Keep the Library in Watchung” filed suit against the Borough of Watchung claiming that the motions I made at the April 19, 2018 meeting violated of the Open Public Meetings Act and the Local Redevelopment and Housing Law. The primary reason I made those motions as those of my fellow Council members and I’m letting the public tonight know, is my concern of Borough spending. I believe as an elected official we have a responsibility to all Borough residents to maintain spending and real estate taxes at the lowest level possible while providing services to Borough residents. In my judgment proceeding with spending public funds on a new Library or the reconstruction of the existing Library, is not justified when there are other facilities and programs that can meet the Borough’s needs. It is how the public treasuries are used which is that I am most concerned. That is and was my motivations for the motions made on April 19, 2018 and is the same concern that motivates me to move the resolution that was just read. While I cannot understand how the April 19, 2018 Council meeting may have violated the Open Public Meetings Act, when 19 separate comments were heard by the Mayor and Council before the Council voted separately on the motions, that is the allegation made in the complaint. So in an effort to conserve public resources, and avoid the unnecessary expenditure of public funds on legal fees, I ask my fellow Council members to favorably consider the two resolutions that we are working on tonight, and consider each resolution anew. It is my hope that by considering each resolution anew, that the OPMA and the Local Redevelopment Housing Law claims made in the complaint named in the complaint, will either be dismissed voluntarily by the plaintiffs or involuntarily by the Court. However, under no circumstances is this action to be*

*considered as an admission of a violation of the Open Public Meetings Act of the Local Redevelopment and Housing Law, but simply a practical approach to curing an alleged violation and avoid the unnecessary expense of litigation. On the second motion, because the words “investigate” and “redevelopment” were used, these words were not used as they are defined in the Local Redevelopment and Housing Law, they were used as words are used in everyday conversation. I was merely using these words as an expression of exploring options for using the Library property as a policy matter and nothing further. Again I am fully aware of the procedural steps to be taken to declare an area in need of redevelopment and that was not the intent of the second motion. With that, I move the first resolution as read.*

*Council President Gibbs said I am not going to read his statement of April 19<sup>th</sup> again, and said he stands by that statement. I am convinced that the data and facts that support a Library are valid for keeping a Library in Watchung, so I will reiterate my statement of April 19<sup>th</sup> without reading it again. After hearing it tonight, I volunteer to be the lead and meet with the resident who tonight made an offer to build a Library.*

*Council President Gibbs volunteered to take the lead to discuss with the homeowner who came forward to explore his offer regarding the library.*

*Councilman Black said we are voting on procedural defects in the way we conducted our business, and this has nothing to do with wanting a library. I do not see any deficiencies; therefore I am voting yes on the motion. He said he feels Mr. Chhabra put a very valid offer on the table and it needs to be explored. He said this offer seems most generous and gracious, and we need to meet with him soon. These resolutions have to do with the procedural deficiencies.*

*Councilwoman Alberto wished to thank all the residents who have either sent letters, wrote emails, or met with her over the past year. After considering all of the correspondence, I would like to list the concerns of these residents. First and foremost, what I heard was that we need a gathering place for all Watchung residents: parents, seniors, reading stations, tutoring areas, children, a place to do homework, a place with wifi and technology, somewhere for the Scouts to meet, somewhere for the Youth Services Committee to meet – which we just received a \$5,000. grant from the County and we have to hold these meetings at Valley View and depend upon teachers and the schools to run these programs. Other needs were a place to hold mah-jong, yoga classes, book clubs, canasta - these are the concerns I have heard over the past year and a half. After careful consideration, I believe a newly renovated Community Center would satisfy these needs. And for books and movie rentals, the Somerset County Library System can satisfy those needs. And for these reasons, I am voting yes on the resolutions.*

*Councilman Sopko said due to the lawsuit, I am supporting the resolution as read, and wish to thank Council President Gibbs for taking the lead on the discussion with the resident’s very generous offer. I also commend the Mayor on his appointment of the Committee.*

*Mayor Pote said the public certainly knows where I stand when it comes to being extremely supportive of having a new Library built and I can’t thank you enough for continuing to come forward, continuing to offer new ideas. Every meeting I learn something new or hear a different perspective of how a Library enriches lives, and thank you to the 700 people who signed the petition that was submitted. Thank you for the over 100 emails expressing the desire to build a library, the desire to keep the library open, the desire to have a referendum. We’ve had two rallies over the years, and many, many meetings with residents. This issue is festering and we need to get it under control. What we’re talking about tonight are legalities and if the legalities go one way, it doesn’t mean there are not policy decisions that need to be made, a couple of Council people referred to that this evening. We need to take action on the policy problems we have in this town – the fact is we need to take action now. The doors are closing on the opportunity to receive State funding and part of that \$125 million dollars- I am extremely frustrated with that, I think its just ridiculous that we are not taking advantage of this. Again, the legalities are separate from policy and when this vote is taken, the group that I just mentioned, they need to act now. They need to listen to the residents and on the side, I am going to recommend some residents to be involved in this process. We need to act now, and have a decision in the next 30 days. I need to have your flexibility and adaptability and I need this Council to act now.*

*Attorney Cruz recommended that this resolution, which was amended to change the charge from the Public Works Committee to the group of three Council members, to further amend it to expand the Duties of this Committee to meet with the resident to discuss his offer to build a new Library. All agreed.*

Councilman Nehls moved the following resolution as amended with a second by Councilwoman Alberto and upon roll call the vote was as follows: Black, Nehls, Sopko, Alberto “aye;” Gibbs, “nay.”

R14: Resolution Considering Anew Not to Spend Public Funds on the Construction of a New Library or Reconstruction of Same and to Seek Alternative Library Services for Borough Residents

Council President Gibbs clarified that his no vote is to be consistent with his vote of April 19<sup>th</sup>, and not to be in disagreement with the discussion they just had to appoint a sub-committee.

Attorney Cruz read R15 in full.

Councilman Nehls moved the following resolution as amended with a second by Councilman Sopko and upon roll call the vote was as follows: Gibbs, Black, Nehls, Sopko, Alberto “aye.”

R15: Resolution Considering Anew Reviewing Alternative Uses for the Library Property Once the Library is No Longer Used as a Branch of the Somerset County Library System.

Councilman Sopko moved the following resolution with a second by Councilman Nehls and upon roll call the vote was as follows: Gibbs, Black, Nehls, Sopko, Alberto “aye.”

R16: Payment of Bills

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**PUBLIC PORTION-GENERAL DISCUSSION**

Sandy Fechtner, Cardinal Drive, said she has been a resident of Watchung for many years and all she is hearing from the Council on why they do not want to build a library is based on fiscal responsibility. She commented on landmarks in Watchung purchased to make the town better. She said the tax payers have always wanted to keep improving the town and this is the first time ever the town wants to reduce what we offer. She feels strongly that this town deserves a library.

Jenn Scharf, Woodledge Road, applauded everyone’s passion but said if anyone here attended a board meeting they would hear from our Board of Education that we really can’t afford much right now. She said the Board of Education is acting responsibly.

Gail Bennett Tufaro O’Donnell, Beechwood Place, said there is one thing in our town that brings us all together, and it’s our Library. The Library is educational and this is the place where everyone needs to come to meet and talk. She asked if we have three gas stations in our town why can’t we afford a library. She asked the Council to reconsider keeping the library open in our town.

Lenore Mohr, Pure Light Properties LLC, said she owns 25 Edgemont Road, said it has been her privilege and honor to be a residential redeveloper in Watchung. She also said she has been here for 15 months due to contractor issues redeveloping a property. She said this has been the most difficult journey to have to get a house to conclusion she has ever had. She commented that safety is her first priority in her company. Her request is to be supported as a developer in the community. Mayor Pote commented that he would like to know what the specifics were on this experience. Mr. Atkins asked Mr. Herits if he was able to meet with the resident and discuss the issues mentioned.

Tom Franklin, Wildwood Terrace, commented on Mr. Cruz’s statement that no discussions regarding the Library occurred in Council Chambers. He said everyone already knew how they were going to vote when it came to the topic of the Library. He also said the resolution came out of left field and was not posted on the agenda. Councilman Black commented that at a Library Advisory Committee meeting and Mr. Franklin was there, he did disclose that the Council is looking into the Exempt Hall and other plans are motion, he said he was very upfront. He said there are plans for the Exempt Hall and they are moving in a positive direction for the community. He added that there is a new offer on the table we need to explore.



Pete Martino, Sunbright Road, said a library is an important thing for our community but traffic, crime, public safety and infrastructure are all also important things. He mentioned the room being full of people due to the library topic but said people need to consistently attend meetings. He said there are many other issues in the Borough that need to be taken care of. He also mentioned that some important factors in selling houses to be considered are our children's education and paving streets with Belgium blocks. He brought up the previous library referendum mentioned from years ago and asked why the change of heart now. Mayor Pote commented it was a question on where the funding should come from for the Library, the Council is now talking about closing the Library, not funding a renovation. Councilman Black said we are not closing a library right now at all, and who knows, with the great proposal on the table, we may not be closing it at all. Councilman Black said he never said he wanted to close the Library, and that he just believes there could be a better location and that is why he has been in discussion with the Exempts.

Tom Ruding, Fox Chase, said the only thing he has heard from the Council is the cost side of how this affects our community. He said if you only look at the cost then there is nothing worth spending money on. He also said, we should be looking at the benefits to the community. He repeated a comment made earlier on how much more money the Borough gets back from having the library and said their decision is fiscally irresponsible.

Corrine Haveson, Maple Street, said she was inspired by Sandy Fechtner's words to ask Councilman Nehls why now is the library on the chopping block? Councilman Nehls asked what else should be on the chopping block? Councilman Nehls said that certain things have to be done and roads have to be repaired. The directive from the State is to share services. Ms. Haveson asked Council President Gibbs to comment on Councilman Nehls statement about the library. Attorney Cruz asked the resident to make specific comments and direct questions to the Mayor and Council. Council President Gibbs said in his April 19<sup>th</sup> statement he laid out all of his reasons and also fiscal numbers, and said he will simply say, he supports a Library and this is a democratic process. In regard to a referendum, Councilman Gibbs said a referendum is non-binding, and as a "body" they made a decision and need to move forward. He noted that even if the referendum made it to the General Election, we would not know the result until November and that is too late to apply for the State funding.

Hans Juetten, Elsinore Drive, said he feels like there is a misunderstanding of what is going on. He said the Library cost will be \$190,000 dollars a year and a 20-year commitment. He asked the Council to be honest with the folks. Councilman Nehls and Mr. Juetten spoke on their opinion on the cost factors of the library.

Gregory Benc, Lakeview Ave, said the Library has been a hot topic for many years. He said he remembers attending a rally outside this building in 2011. This is an example of an important topic and obviously means something to the people. There are back-room decisions being made. He said its time to drain the swamp and he can't wait to get into the voting booth and know that he voted for people with a vision. He said he goes around the circle and can see a new gas station going up, and nothing being done about a decrepit library.

Tom Franklin, Wildwood Terrace, commented to Councilman Nehls on his obligations as a Council person. He said it is to give the residents what they want, and it's the Council's obligation to do so.

Jay Stiles, Anderson Road, asked if we are considering a community center at the Exempt Hall or a Library with community center features in it. He spoke on the cost of employees for the library verses the Exempt Hall Building.

Tamara Benc, Lakeview Ave, stressed that the discussion is about a Library, not a restaurant, nail salon, or gas station. She said we have been talking for years – about a Library. She said this is really sad. She said if we are talking about fiscal responsibility, then we are being fiscally irresponsible by not attempting to apply for the State funding. Ms. Benc said the annual cost for residents to fund the Library amounts to about 2 manicures or a daily cup of coffee. She reminded all that there will be a "different" type of referendum that will be on the ballot in November.

Councilman Black said there were comments tonight implying that decisions are made behind closed doors. He said everything was properly aligned; however, it did not progress as planned. Councilman Black said he has tried many times unsuccessfully to contact the Mayor by phone to discuss the Library.

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**ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business to come before the Council the meeting was adjourned at 10:12 P.M. to the Call of the Chair and to the next scheduled Council meeting Thursday, August 16, 2018 at 7:30 P.M.

Respectfully Submitted,

Regina Angelo, RMC  
Administrative Assistant